

Chapter 16

HOME LIFE AT No. 1

293 WHEN the women are working in the fields through the heat
 [132] of the day—and it is very, very hot at 7,800 feet with a tem-
 854 perature of 105° in the shade—they usually have a large square
 ● 482 of cotton cloth with them, which they sometimes throw over
 their heads for protection. This cloth turns in for all sorts of
 purposes; if you are carrying a small quantity of flour home
 from the mill you can wrap it up and tie it across from one
 shoulder to the other armpit and so keep both hands free. If
 the baby is too small to sit safely on your back or shoulders,
 you treat it in the same way. In fact, if you see a woman with
 this kind of bundle that appears to have two lumps in it you
 may safely guess that it's a baby.

342 I made great friends with the family who worked just below
 us (I have named them in my notebook Household No. 1), and
 I felt quite sad when their wheat harvest was over—it was so
 convenient just to run down and join them in sight of our own
 windows. They asked me, however: "Won't you come home
 and sit in our shade?" Of course I accepted with delight. It
 was just a few steps along the Dála and down one of the little
 lanes, half path, half watercourse. We came to a slightly taller,
 mud-plastered wall on the left with a wooden door in it.
 Through this I stepped in to a tiny courtyard with a shed on
 each side, one for straw and one for the lambs and kids. The
 [333] house itself is just a rough cube of stones plastered with mud,
 and it has a flat roof with a smoke-hole in it above the central
 hearth. You go up by a ladder, and the roof makes a nice place
 for sitting out, watching the neighbours go by, spinning, and
 drying apricots. It has a second store-room built on a part of

Chapter 18

SEPTEMBER HARVEST

SUMMER is a breathless time in the Hunza fields. No sooner ²⁴³ does the ripening grain show a fine "fox-brown" than a line ⁵¹⁶ of five or six men and women attack it in unison. They do ⁵⁹² not "reap" in our sense of the word. They squat in that inimitably convenient way that the East has preserved for working—no backs bent with stooping, no knees worn out with kneeling—and grasp a full handful of the ripe stalks and pull up roots and all; first right, then left; clap the two together to shake off the all-too-valuable earth; lay the bundle behind them; shuffle on a pace and repeat. The fields are small and in an incredibly short space of time a golden field is prostrate and the ground carpeted with neatly aligned rows of swathes. It is beautiful to see a party at work: father and mother, daughters, sons, and wives; they space themselves and keep their line as exactly as soldiers on parade, yet each works individually, each at his own pace and in his own way—without haste and without pause. They possess rude iron sickles, but ⁴¹² when these are used at all they are not used to cut, but merely to pull against, if the crop is more than usually deep-rooted.

When the *shandiming* (cut crops) have lain a little and been ²⁴³ turned over once or twice they are tied into sheaves and ⁴⁸² gathered into piles, some as big as a man can carry, others smaller to suit a boy—according to the "man-power" available. A double goat's hair rope is slipped round the waist of the pile and ingeniously knotted so as to leave two shoulder loops. The man or boy flings himself down backwards on to it, slips his arms through the loops and hitches the rope fast. Then some kindly bystander gives a touch to the load from behind,

SEPTEMBER HARVEST

243 and by a gymnastic miracle the bearer staggers to his feet,
 ● 482 almost invisible under his tossing burden, and sets off at a
 trot up a steep flight of rough stones, or a boulder track, or a
 rude wooden ladder laid against a high field wall, to the thresh-
 243 ing-floor. Beside this, a stack is built by other workers as the
 loads come in. A core of several upright sheaves forms the
 centre; layers of other sheaves are laid symmetrically round
 these, heads to centre, roots out, till the stack is 5 or 6 feet
 high. The priceless grain is thus beyond the greed of passing
 goats, and if rain threatens a carpet flung on top suffices to
 keep the whole erection dry. The moment the *shandiming* are
 off the ground the children drive their tiny flocks, one minute
 cow, a couple of sheep and goats, on to the empty field, and
 the hungry beasts greedily snatch at every green blade of grass
 or weed they chance to sight. There is cruelly little. In the
 early days the crop is diligently and systematically weeded, and
 even after the grain has reached some height the field is in-
 vaded every few days by the women and children in the hopes
 that some further weeds may be detected and carried off for
 fodder. The two stages of weeding are quite distinct. I was
 much laughed at one day, when the second stage had set in, for
 asking a party of crouching women whether they were "weed-
 ing." "Oh, no," they said, "weeding time is long since
 over; we are just fetching some green stuff for the cow." Both
 weedings are done so thoroughly that the expectant
 beasts who invade the new-reaped field have quickly cleared
 the few remaining stalks.

857 When the fields are temporarily empty a great feeling of
 freedom pervades the land. The boys rejoice in the rare luxury
 of flat open spaces for foot polo, tip-cat, races, rounders, and
 a dozen other games; the weavers seize the chance to lay out
 their warp and the girls romp and play ball—"the fields are
 free" is joyfully remarked on every side. DL and I rejoiced
 no less in being able to walk side by side on the flat—an experi-
 ence foregone these many months—and take short-cuts from
 one farmstead to another without the usual boulder-jumping
 scramble.

But the freedom of the fields is short-lived.

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1. Little girl barely five taking baby brother of two for a ride. Madat, the elder boy, watches the experiment with some anxiety. (See p. 137)



2. Fetching firewood in a shoulder basket. (See p. 131)

PLATE XV

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3. Gülo and friends working mud into "cakes like those Mother makes." A wish-fulfilment of Starvation Springtime. (See p. 290)

[Facing p. 176]

Hunza or Nagir, not once did I see a bit of organic material of any kind wasted or destroyed. The people made regular foraging trips to different parts of the country and always brought back for their land any grass or other organic material that was found and could be brought home.

They would walk many miles in search of grass or green growth of any kind. Regularly I saw men, women and boys carrying huge packs on their backs. It was a mass of green packed into a cloth and carried to their farm to be fed to the animals or distributed over the small fields.

Up until the present time chemical fertilizers have not invaded Hunza. Whether there is any connection between the splendid health of the Hunzans and the fact that they have never used commercial fertilizers, I am unable to state. But it is worth considering!

Remember, there are no forests, peat bogs or other sources of organic material like we have in most parts of Europe and America. Every bit of organic material that the Hunzan farmer uses or procures is got at the expense of hard work or difficult travel. So it is easy to see why they can afford to waste not one iota of this life-sustaining substance.

If you have ever traveled to Switzerland, you would probably be struck or amazed by the neat piles of manure that are built in front of most farm residences and there a man's prestige and intrinsic value are estimated by the size of his manure pile. Don't laugh—I'm not joking! I'm dead serious and I swear this is absolutely true! Wise, oh, very wise, are the Swiss!

In Hunza, unfortunately, manure piles are seldom if ever encountered because the manure is placed on their fields as soon as it is ready. I looked into countless animal stables but never once did I see a manure pile . . .

534 *The piano in the palace was brought by the Mir's*
644 *grandfather. This was stated in one of the books I read*
about Hunza.

The story from the Mir's own lips is, "The piano was brought to Gilgit via Bandipoor and Burzil Pass from Kashmir for the Political Agent who was British. It was installed in the Political Agent's house in Gilgit in 1895. In 1947 when the partition came, it was presented to me by the last British Political Agent, Colonel R. N. Bacon, along with the Union Jack which is unfurled in Gilgit. The piano was brought to Baltit on the backs of 24 men."

164 *Disease is unknown in Hunza. Oh, how I wish that*
were true! It was the fondest wish of my heart and
soul when I left for Hunza that I could return and be
able to attest the fact that disease is unknown in that
country.

From definite assertions made by the doctor who was stationed at Aliabad in Hunza, it is true that such diseases as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension are absolutely unknown in Hunza. But there are other diseases, perhaps not as crucial but, nevertheless, maladies of a serious nature.

As more of civilization's luxuries become known and used in Hunza, it is assured that many more of the diseases of civilization, as yet unknown in Hunza, will make their way into that country.

165 *No infant mortality—I am unable to speak for the*
past, but at the present day infant mortality is known
in Hunza. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, statis-
tics are unavailable as no records are kept. But the
present doctor in Aliabad forcibly states that infant
mortality is a force to be reckoned with in Hunza at
the present time.